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“Spiritual Birth”

[John 3:1-18](#)

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There is a difference between PHYSICAL birth and SPIRITUAL birth. Physical birth was the will and decision of others, but spiritual birth is your choice. There was a Jewish man named Nicodemus who didn't understand spiritual birth. Like so many people today, people were confused and curious about Jesus. The conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3 helps us to understand what it means to be “born again.” Have you been born again?

1. [John 3:1-18](#) - *“There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again.” The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.’ Nicodemus answered and said to Him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes*

*in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”*

- a. The word “born” appears eight times in the first eight verses
- b. Jesus was not referring to physical birth, but spiritual birth
  - i. A person’s physical birth happens when the will of other people (the parents) joins with the will of God
  - ii. A person’s spiritual birth happens when the will of the individual joins with the will of God
  - iii. **John 1:12-23** – *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”*
- c. Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus is only recorded in the Gospel of John

## 2. Nicodemus

- a. A Jew with a Greek name
  - i. Means “victory of the people”
  - ii. *Nike*, meaning “victory,” and *demos*, meaning “the people”
- b. A Pharisee
  - i. Jewish ruling sect
    - 1. Strict separatists: they attempted to keep themselves separate from sin/evil/impure things
- c. A member of the Sanhedrin
  - i. Seventy-man Jewish ruling council
    - 1. Like a Jewish Supreme Court
- d. **John 3:10** – *“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?’”*
  - i. Nicodemus was well-known in theological circles as a master teacher
- e. He understood that he did not know everything
  - i. He came to Jesus at night as Jesus was not liked among the Sanhedrin

## 3. Confusion

- a. **John 3:2** – *“Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”*
- b. Nicodemus was trying to reconcile the Sanhedrin’s negative opinion of Jesus with the fact that God’s presence was obvious in Jesus’ life
  - i. People often accept a view of the “historical Jesus” as a good teacher who performed miracles but who wasn’t the Son of God
- c. Jesus helped Nicodemus understand who he was

- i. [John 3:13-16](#) – *“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*
- ii. “Only begotten Son” translates to *monogenēs* in Greek, which means “one of a kind.” Jesus is directly a part of God. Jesus is God

#### 4. Curiosity

- a. [John 3:5](#) – *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”*
- b. Nicodemus thought Jesus was stating that people needed to be physically born twice
- c. Some people think the phrase “born of water” is indicating that baptism is a requirement for salvation
  - i. [John 3:6](#) makes it clear that “water” referred to natural birth and “Spirit” referred to spiritual birth: *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”*
- d. Jesus then anticipates a question – how can one “see” spiritual birth?
  - i. [John 3:7-8](#) – *“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*
    - 1. As the wind cannot be seen but its effects can be felt and seen, so it is with spiritual birth
- e. [John 3:11](#) – *“Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.”*
  - i. When he said “We,” Jesus was speaking to the plurality of the Godhead

#### 5. Conviction

- a. Jesus drew a comparison between an Old Testament story and his forthcoming sacrifice on the cross
- b. [John 3:14](#) – *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up...”*
  - i. In Numbers 21 God sent venomous snakes to bite and kill the Israelites as punishment for grumbling against the Lord. When the people repented, God provided gracious provision for those who were bitten to be saved:
    - 1. [Numbers 21:7-9](#) – *“Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and*

*against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.’ So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.”*

2. The serpent represented sin, the bronze represented judgment, and the pole represented the cross
3. God made gracious provision for mankind to be saved through Jesus’ death on the cross

## 6. Conversion

- a. **John 3:16-18** – *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”*
  - i. There is no other provision or remedy for salvation than accepting God’s forgiveness and putting one’s faith in Jesus. Everyone who believes in him will be saved and be with the Lord forever
  - ii. The story does not tell us if Nicodemus was saved, but it seems likely that he was
    1. **John 19:39-40** – *“And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury.”*
    2. When everyone else deserted Jesus, Nicodemus was present with Joseph of Arimathea to care for Jesus’ body following his crucifixion
  - iii. What matters most is spiritual birth
    1. **Romans 8:1** – *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit...”*

## Discussion Questions

1. Read **John 3:1-18** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. A person’s physical birth happens when the will of other people (the parents) joins with the will of God. When does spiritual birth happen? (See #1b-iii)

3. What was Nicodemus' role in Jewish leadership? How did his view of Jesus differentiate him from other members of leadership? (See #2 above)
4. How did Jesus help Nicodemus understand that he was the Son of God and not just a good teacher who performed miracles? How can we apply these truths when talking with people who see Jesus as simply a good man? (See #3c above)
5. What did Jesus mean when he said that people needed to be "*born of water and the Spirit?*" (See #4a, b, and c above)
6. How can a person "see" spiritual birth? (See #4d above)
7. Read [John 3:14](#) and [Numbers 21:7-9](#). Why did Jesus compare the story of the venomous snakes to his death on the cross? (See #5 above)
8. Read [John 3:16-18](#). What is the only provision for salvation?
9. How should the words of Jesus in [John 3:16-18](#) affect our interactions with other people?
10. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)